

KIRAKOS GANJAKEC'I AND HIS HISTORY
OF ARMENIA

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In the course of its long history, Armenian culture has had several periods of revival and decline. The cultural revival which reached its peak in the tenth century was followed by a decline, due to the wholesale destruction of learning upon the onslaught of Seljuk and Mongol invasions of the Armenian homeland. Eyewitness accounts are given by the historians Aristakēs Lastivertc'i and Kirakos Ganjakec'i.

Although designated as a History of Armenia, the thirteenth-century historiography of Kirakos Ganjakec'i represents an important source for the medieval history of Asia Minor, especially for the Mongol invasions. Interestingly enough the conventional title, History of Armenia,¹ is not warranted by the most important manuscripts of the text. Rather the longer title, a brief history from the time of St. Gregory to the last days, by Kirakos, the worthy vardapet of the well-known monastery of Getik, which is found in at least twenty-five manuscripts² and which in fact seems to be a legitimate title, corresponds with the content of the book, since the second half—and the longer part—of the work deals exclusively with the history of Asia Minor, Transcaucasia, Georgia and Albania. Among the four Armenian editions of Kirakos's History the most complete edition is of K. A. Melik'-Ohanjanyan, who produced an exhaustive work based on the existing forty or more manuscripts and on their different readings.³

The abundance of the manuscripts of the text has given Kirakos's work an unprecedented advantage. They date from the sixteenth century.⁴ Twenty-eight of the extant manuscripts are kept in the Matenadaran in

T. Samuelian & M. Stone, eds. Medieval Armenian Culture. (University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 6). Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983. pp. 262 to 271.

Erevan, and the rest are catalogued in Venice, Jerusalem and Paris.

The author is known as a thirteenth-century Armenian historian, a cleric, whose surname identifies his home as Ganjak, in Eastern Armenia, near the borders of Caucasian Albania. He was born in 1203 and was from the "province of Ganjak," rather than from the city of Ganjak. Kirakos informs us that Mxit'ar Goš, his famous contemporary author of Datastan-agirk' (Code Book), "was from the city of Ganjak, whereas others, such as Yovhannēs Sarkawag, Dawit' Alawka Ordi, were from the "province of Ganjak; so was I."⁵ This obviously indicates a distinction between the two locations: the province of Ganjak and the city of Ganjak.

The most important manuscripts identify the author of Kirakos's History as "the worthy vardapet of Getik."⁶ This designation is coupled with another name, "Arewelc'i," and is referred to a certain Kirakos, also of the thirteenth century, who has compiled the Yaysmawurk' (Menologion) in 1269. There are subsequently two legitimate surnames—Getikc'i and Arewelc'i—according to the different colophons of the same Menologion. Scholars have agreed that both designations belong to our historian Ganjakec'i, and that the latter was also the author of the Yaysmawurk'. Ł. Ališan has preserved the colophon which reads:

"With hope in God and by the love towards His saints I, Kirakos vardapet Arewelc'i, compiled the feasts of God's saints according to the commemoration of each (saint's) day. I also wrote their history which was not found in the book of Yaysmawurk' and edited it with the original (text) . . . This was done in 1269 in Sis, the capital of Cilicia, during the reign of King Het'um and in the first year of the crown-prince Levon, in the sixty-sixth year of our life, when (the book) came to its completion for the glory of God."⁷

This colophon is striking because it establishes the correct date of Kirakos's birth. In 1269 the author claims to have been 66 yaers of age, therefore, he must have been born in 1203. Moreover, the information given in the actual History of Kirakos supports this date. This is what we read:

"When this book was written in the year 1241, during the reign of King Het'um the Pious of Cilicia . . . it was in our fortieth year, more or less."⁸

Still another copy of the Yaysmawurk' whose colophon identifies Kirakos as Arewelc'i and from the monastery of Getik: "Kirakos vardapet

Arewelc'i, from the monastery of Getik, the compiler and the illustrator of this testament."⁹

Conclusion: (a) On different occasions Kirakos is identified by three surnames but is nonetheless one and the same author. (b) He acquired different names from the different phases of his life. He was recognized as Ganjakec'i, because he was from "the province of Ganjak." He was known as Getikc'i, because he studied at Nor Getik and lived there for a long time.¹⁰ And he was called Arewelc'i, because his ecclesiastical and literary activities flourished in "the district of the East."¹¹

Kirakos is well acquainted with the Armenian historiography preceding his era. He also knows of the histories written by Xosrov, Šapuh Bagratuni, and Yovhannēs Vanakan, whose texts have not reached us. He specifically refers to John Catholicos's History, and uses the works of Movsēs Dasxuranc'i and Samuēl Anec'i. He compiled a special chapter on the history of the Caucasian Albanians¹² following the longer version of the history of that nation by Dasxuranc'i. He either copied portions verbatim from, or summarized the lengthy descriptions of his tenth century colleague.¹³ Although Samuēl's name is only quoted twice by Kirakos as "Samuel the priest of the cathedral of Ani,"¹⁴ his Chronology has served as another primary source to Kirakos.¹⁵

Kirakos is one of the very few Armenian historians who, along with historical events that he narrates, offers an interesting autobiography through chronology, names, and with expressions of gratitude towards his superiors. He is very much attached to the monastery of Nor Getik and to his famous teacher Yovhannēs Vanakan. Although Kirakos speaks about Mxit'ar Goš at length, he was hardly a disciple of this great teacher, since Goš died in 1213 when Kirakos had barely reached the age of ten. His famous teacher was Vanakan who died in 1251¹⁶ as he, Kirakos himself states: "This we (attest) not as hearsay but as an eyewitness, for we stayed with him (Vanakan) for a long time to study at the monastery of Tawuš."¹⁷

Vanakan left Getik for Tawuš where he established the school of Xoranašat around 1215-1220. Here Kirakos studied under his beloved teacher until 1225 when Jahal-ad-Din Mengubirdi, the last of the Khawarasm Shahs (d. 1231), invaded Georgia and Armenia, and destroyed Xoranaša. Soon after Kirakos was captured by Molar Nuin: "Then they captured me and separated me from my friends to use my services as secretray to read and write their correspondences."¹⁸ This happened in the middle of the year 1236 when the

Mongols were ready to retire "from our country to go far away into foreign lands." Kirakos stayed with them in captivity "until (God) visited us, according to his will." He ultimately escaped by night on the day his teacher Vanakan was released in 1236.

Obviously Kirakos's intentional capture by the Mongols brings out the interesting question of language. Being from the "province of Ganjak," where Turkish and Persian languages were predominant, Kirakos must have been well versed in these tongues. Actually there are indications which demonstrate Kirakos's knowledge of Persian and Arabic languages. For example, speaking of a certain fortress, Kirakos gives its name and says: "which was called xoyaxana in the Persian language;"¹⁹ or a certain tree "which the Persians called chandarin."²⁰ He also translates the Arabic word khalifa by adding "because khalifa means a successor" or "they called khalifa, that is the successor of Muhammad."²¹ Kirakos even preserves words in the language of the Mongols: xunan (battlefield), t'un (fortress), t'anjah (stronghold). We should remember that the official language of the Seljuks and of the Shah Armens was Persian. Only later, in mid-1280s, after Jimri's revolt, it was replaced by the Turkish.²² During the Ilkhanid period, the Mongols came under the influence of Iran and adopted the Persian as their official language.²³ As for Ganjak itself, the rulers were Muslim and the population was Persian: "This city (Ganjak) was well inhabited by Persians" who lived together with the Armenians.²⁴ Moreover, Mongol armies comprised considerable number of Turkic and Persian descendants who were in direct contact with Vanakan and his captive disciples.²⁵

Extensive description is provided by Kirakos concerning the monastery of Nor Getik since he was one of the important pillars of that school. Here he assumed the leadership of the doctrine which emphasized the "Eastern" tradition of the Armenian faith as against the "Cilician," the latter being more Latinized and under the constant influence of the Crusaders. As he himself states: "on the question raised among the Christians pertaining to the Holy Spirit of God" Kirakos sided strongly with the doctors of the East (Armenian proper), following the teachings of Vanakan, Vardan Arewelc'i, and others. This question of dogma is directly connected with the Synod of Sis, convened by Catholicos Constantine in 1252, upon the receipt of Pope Innocent's letter. The Catholicos, pursuant to the conciliar decision, had written "to the province of the East, in Great Armenia, to the learned vardapet Vanakan, to Vardan Arewelc'i, and to Yovsēp'," who were the

leaders of the doctrinal formulations and men of authority.²⁶ It is obvious that here there is dependence on the "east" on matters of doctrine and authority, notwithstanding the political and ecclesiastical power which is centered in the "west."

In 1255 Kirakos met Het'um, the Armenian king of Cilicia, while the latter was returning from his trip to Samarkand, the capital of Mongolia. It was in the village of Vardenis, in the district of Aragacotn, where Kirakos heard Het'um speak on "the barbarous nations whom he had seen and heard."²⁷ The Mongol hordes had swept through Armenia and Georgia far into Anatolia. Het'um recognized that only in alliance with them his kingdom could be saved. He first sent his brother Smbat the Constable on an official embassy to Karakorum, who returned with the guarantee of Cilicia's integrity. Smbat's departure and return are dated by the Constable himself in his *Taregirk'*, i.e. "the year 697 (=1248) when I went" and "the year 699 (=1250) when I returned to my brother Het'um."²⁸ In 1253 Het'um visited Great Armenia on his way back. It is assumed by Melik'-Ohanjanyan that it was at that time that Kirakos must have received an invitation to go to Cilicia. One thing is clear: by this time and until 1260 Kirakos was still at Nor Getik according to a record preserved in an inscription on the walls of the monastery, which mentions Kirakos's name twice, first as a donor, and then as a mediator who exercised his power to relieve his people from the heavy taxes.²⁹ In any event Kirakos was in Sis, Cilicia, in 1268/69, at the time when he was working on the *Menologion*, and this is the last date that we know of Kirakos's life. Probably soon after he returned to his monastery and there he died in 1271, as we learn from his colleague Grigor Akanc':

"It was in the year 720 of the Armenian calendar (720 + 551 = 1271) when the glorious Armenian vardapets Vardan and Kirakos passed away."³⁰

Kirakos began to write his *History* on May 19, 1241 on the Sunday of Pentecost: "This day when we undertook this work is the feast of the advent of the most holy Spirit in the upper room."³¹ He worked on his book at least for two decades before it was completed. Whereas the first section of the *History* forms a compilation of events "from the previous historiography," the second part, the more interesting and valuable section, contains the contemporary history written by the author as "auricular and as an eyewitness."³² It ends with the events of the year 714 of the Armenian era (1265), when the Ilkhan Abaghu, the mongol ruler of Persia, married

Despoina, the illegitimate daughter of the Paleologue emperor Michael VIII, after himself being christened by the Patriarch of Antioch.³³ Hulaghu, Mangu's brother and the founder of the Mongol empire in Persia, died the same year (1265) according to Kirakos.³⁴ The closing date of Kirakos's History is verified by Vardan who adds that "it was the period between 685 (1236) and 714 (1265) that was covered by Vanakan and Kirakos concerning the Mongols, the Persians, the Albanians, the Armenians, the Georgians, and the Greeks."³⁵ There is also the extensive work of Jami' al-tawarikh³⁶ (The Assembly of Histories) left by the wazir Rashid-al-Din (1247-1318), who used materials collected by a number of collaborators and wrote in the colloquial Persian of his day. This work contains large sections of the history of the Mongols, of India and Europe and, being contemporary with Kirakos's work, can along with Vardan's History, help in reconstructing the unfinished ending of Kirakos.

In the last and inconclusive paragraph of his history, Kirakos tells about Abaghu's battle with Berke Khan (1257-1267), the leader of the Golden Horde, who led his army through the gates of Darband and encamped on the banks of the river Kura. The other bank of the river was kept by Abaghu's troops. The battle across the Kura is recorded by Rashid-al-Din which ends by the victory of Abaghu who was finally able to force Berke to leave the river bank and head towards Tiflis. Berke dies on the way and is buried in Saray, the capital of Batu, while Abaghu retires to Mazandaran and Gurgan to spend the winter of 1266/67. The same details are found in Vardan's History.³⁷ All three—Rashid-al-Din, Vardan, and Kirakos—give the same date (1265/66) for the battle between Abaghu and Berke. In this way we can reconstruct the ending of Kirakos's work.

Kirakos essentially describes the political, social and economic events which resulted from the Mongol invasions of Eastern Armenia, Georgia and Albania. Such were, for example, the fading away of the minor kingdoms and the feudal lords of Armenia, the domination of the Seljuks, and the adherence of the Armenians to the Georgians, under whom the Zacharids enjoyed self-determination and independence. In addition to his account of the Mongol invasions, Kirakos has recorded certain policies of taxation, beliefs, even customs and the language of the Mongols. He has carefully described the gradual transition of the lands and the landholding privileges from the hands of the Armenian feudal lords to the Mongol rulers, then to the Armenian church hierarchy, and eventually to the mercantile class. The

description Kirakos gives about the Mongol as a member of a distinct race with his peculiar appearance, behavior and manners is enlightening. In the chapter entitled "On the description of the appearance of a Mongol" Kirakos says:

The way they looked was frightening. No beard at all, but sometimes a little hair on the jaw or around the lips. Narrow and penetrating eyes, sharp voice and a race which lived long. They ate meat of all animals, clean and unclean, but above all they preferred the horse meat which they broiled or roasted without salt. Then they dipped the meat in salty water piece by piece and ate. As they ate, some prostrated like the camels, and others sat, but all, lords and slaves, ate together. While drinking the wine one held the bowl and the other filled his cup from the bowl and scattered the beverage in the air in four directions—north, south, east and west—and then tasted, and finally gave it to the senior of the clan. Always the slave ate and drank first and then the elders, so as to avoid any risk of poisonous food or beverage. ³⁸

Kirakos, unlike his predecessors, utilized inscriptions preserved on monuments or on monastery walls as sources for his history. While writing on Mxit'ar Goš and on the famous monastery of Getik, he relied on the inscriptions that he found on the walls pertaining to the construction work, the builders, and those who contributed to the erection of the monuments. There is no doubt that Kirakos, enriched with vast and contemporary sources, became one of the indispensable authors of the Middle Ages, to be quoted by his successors. By later generations, Kirakos's History was considered as the only reliable source for the Mongol invasions in Armenia, and as such was quoted by subsequent historians. Vardan Arewelc'i has recorded that he had used Kirakos's History for the passages concerning "the nation of the archers, the Persians, the Albanians, the Armenians, and the Georgians, as well as the Greeks . . . the histories of which were written in detail by the blessed vardapets Vanakan and by our dear (brother) Kirakos . . . which history we did not dare write for the third time . . . but just summarized it by enumerating the events of importance and worthy of mention . . ." ³⁹ Although Vardan in the main summarized Kirakos's passages, but in some cases important differences in information suggest that two different sources were used by each independently. Melik'-Ohanjanyan is inclined to think that

Vanakan's lost work might have been the one used by Vardan; or that the difference may lie in Vardan's personal knowledge and observations.

NOTES

¹The designation of the History as "Armenian" is not original and goes as far back as the first edition of the work by Oskan Tēr-Georgian Yovhanniseanc' of Erevan. Cf. Patmut'iwn Hayoc' arareal Kirakosi vardapeti Ganjakec'woy (Moscow, 1858).

²Kirakos Ganjakeci', Patmut'iwn Hayoc', ed. K. A. Melik'-Ohanjanyan (Erevan, 1961) VIII, XXX-XXXI.

³(a) Patmut'iwn Hayoc' (ed. Oskan Ter-Georgian).

(b) Kirakosi vardapeti Ganjakec'woy hamafot Patmut'iwn i srboyn Grigorē c'awurs iwr lusabaneal (Venice, 1865).

(c) Patmut'win Hayoc' arareal Kirakosi vardapeti Ganjakec'woy (Tiflis, 1909) [Reprint of 1858 edition].

(d) Patmut'iwn Hayoc', ed. K. A. Melik'-Ohanjanyan (Erevan, 1961).

⁴Cf. Kirakos (ed. Melik'-Ohanjanyan) Int. 95-111.

⁵Ibid., 116.

⁶Cf. note 2 above.

⁷Ľ. Ališan, Hayapatum (Venice, 1901) 472.

⁸Kirakos, 278.

⁹M. Awgerian, Liakatar Vark' Srboc', 76. Cf. No. 219 of Vienna in Tašan's Catalog der armenischen Handschriften der Mechitaristen Bibliothek zu Wien (Vienna, 1895-96) 559.

¹⁰Kirakos, 222: "Many brethren came to the famous monastery of (Nor Getik) which became the center of education for many, the same monastery where we ourselves were educated."

¹¹The Armenian chieftains in the northeast of Armenia were backed by the Georgian kings and often resisted the Mongol invasions. The peaceful alliance between Armenia and Georgia availed time and effort for the culture to flourish in Eastern Armenia. Monasteries became the main centers for education of science and literature: Sanahin, Haḥbat, Nor Getik, Xoranašat,

Hałarcin, Keč'atıs, Ayrivank' are well known schools in the 13th century. The teachers in those centers of education were Yovhannēs Tawuṣec'i, Mxit'ar Goṣ, Vanakan Vardapet, Kirakos, Vardan Arewelc'i, and others.

¹²Kirakos, 192-201.

¹³Cf. Movsēs Kałankatuac'i, Patmut'iwn Ałuanic (Tiflis, 1913). English trans. by C. J. F. Dowsett, The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i (London-New York, 1961).

¹⁴Kirakos, 8, 84.

¹⁵Cf. Samuēl Anec'i, Chronology, French trans. by M. F. Brosset, Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie, II (Paris, 1867-68).

¹⁶Kirakos, 348.

¹⁷Ibid., 218.

¹⁸Ibid., 249.

¹⁹Ibid., 313.

²⁰Ibid., 235.

²¹Ibid., 376, 378.

²²Cf. Siaset Nameh, the book about the office of the 11th century Vizir, by Nizam al-Mulk (Moscow-Leningrad, 1949) 242.

²³Cf. Bertold Spuler, Die Mongolen in Iran (Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanenzeit 1220-1350) (Berlin, 1955) 59.

²⁴Kirakos, 226.

²⁵Spuler, Die Mongolen, 450-58.

²⁶Kirakos, 310.

²⁷Ibid., 371.

²⁸Smbat the Constable, Taregirk' (Paris, 1859) 124; Cf. Kirakos, 364.

²⁹Cf. H. Ačarıyan, Hayoc' Anjnanunneri Bałaran, II (Erevan, 1944) 625; H. Janp'olatyan, "Mxit'ar Goṣ ew Nor Getiki Vank'ē," Aṣxatut'yunner Hayastani Petakan Patmakan T'angarani, I (Erevan, 1948).

³⁰Grigor Akanc'i, History of the Nation of the Archers (ed. Patkanian; St. Petersburg, 1870) 52.

³¹Kirakos, 9-10.

³²Ibid., 218.

³³At the end of the first section the declaration and profession of the creed of the Armenian Church by the Armenian Catholicos Nersēs IV Šnorhali (1100-1173) is inserted by Kirakos (121-147). The text is authentic and identical with the original preserved and published in Šnorhali's Ēndhanrakan T'ut't'k' (Jerusalem, 1871) 87-107. Kirakos also includes in his History the encyclical of Catholicos Constantine I Barjrbardc'i (1221-1267) pertaining to the Council of Sis taken place in 1243. Cf. Kirakos, 259-300. The encyclical is followed by the twenty-five decisions adopted by the Council (Ibid., 301-310). Cf. Oramanian, Azgapatum (Constantinople, 1913) II.1626-1635. The History also contains a text on the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father (Ibid., 329-333) which is "acceptable to the Armenian Church and to the spirit of Kirakos, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father and is manifested through the Son." Ibid., 333.

³⁴Kirakos, 398.

³⁵Vardan Arewelc'i, Patmut'iwn Tiezerakan (ed. M. Emin; Moscow, 1861) 192.

³⁶Russian trans. of Moscow-Leningrad is quoted by Melik'-Ohanjanyan, cf. Kirakos, 34, n. 4 (Int.). Also cf. The Cambridge History of Islam (Cambridge, 1970) I.168.

³⁷Vardan, 213.

³⁸Kirakos, 271-72.

³⁹Vardan, 192.